



Town of Wilmington

Wilmington, Massachusetts 01887

Kathleen Black Reynolds
Chairperson, Historical Commission
(978) 729-3600
reynoldskathleen@verizon.net

Terry McDermott
Curator, Town Museum
(978) 658-5475
hitavern@wilmingtonma.gov

Introduction

The Wilmington Historical Commission (“Commission”) was asked to present the enclosed report to the Board of Selectmen and the Town Manager in response to the Board’s 2014 Warrant Article calling for the demolition of the Whitefield School, and the community’s favorable vote at the 2014 Town Meeting to table the issue of demolition until the 2015 Town Meeting.

The members of the Commission who contributed to this report include: Bonny Smith, Gerald Duggan, Steve Lawrenson, Diane Harvey, Bob Mallett, and Kathleen Black Reynolds. Curator Terry McDermott was also highly involved and contributed information relative to preservation grant opportunities available to the Town of Wilmington and the Commission. The Commission’s clerk, Patricia Cardarelli, has been instrumental in her contributions to this process. Members of the community, department heads and employees contributed input as well.

Overview

The Wilmington Historical Commission exists to protect and conserve our historical resources, and to educate our citizens on Wilmington’s rich history. The Commission is made up of seven volunteers appointed by the Town Manager and confirmed by the Board of Selectmen. Each of the volunteers is employed and have raised their families in the community. The members meet once per month, excluding July and August, participate in community events throughout the Town (library programs, elder services programs, school programs, Farmers Market, Harnden Tavern and Town Museum programs, Minuteman programs, etc.), and work with a limited Commission budget to preserve the Town’s historic resources and educate the community as to the same. The members took an oath to preserve Wilmington’s historic resources, but they are not urban planners or architects. The Town Curator is overseen by the Commission and she attends its monthly meetings.

The Commission meets the second Monday of the month (excluding July and August) either at the Town Hall (Room 4) or at the Town Museum at 7:00 p.m. Its Agenda is posted at the Town Hall, and its meetings are open to the public. The Commission welcomes public input and participation at its meetings and attendance at its events.

Limitations

To the best of its ability, the Commission submits the enclosed report with the objective of highlighting the historical significance of the Whitefield School, preservation funding available to the Town for preserving and revitalizing the structure, limitations on the Commission's abilities, and potential uses of the building.

The Commission recognizes and understands that the building (1) is owned by the Town; (2) is within the School Department's purview; (3) is vacant; (4) requires either a new roof or roof repairs; (5) may require other repairs; (6) contains asbestos; (7) has no current or future planned use; (8) is not going to be conveyed to private ownership; (9) has potential for residential and/or commercial use which may require rezoning.

It is the opinion of the Commission that, despite these limitations, the Whitefield School has great potential for multiple uses (see Suggested Uses). The Commission is aware that the Town has no master facilities plan for its municipally-owned buildings. Although a request for funds for a feasibility study on the Town-owned buildings was made by the Town Manager for FY16, the Finance Committee discouraged the same and the Article was removed from the Warrant prior to Town Meeting. It is the opinion of the Commission that this feasibility study would have provided the entire community with a long-range plan for its municipally-owned buildings, including those with historic value.

The Commission's budget is one of the smallest budgets in the community. The Commission is fiscally responsible and does not, itself, have the ability to expend or raise funds to preserve all of Wilmington's historical resources. Unfortunately, this has led to "demolition by neglect" of some of our historic and other resources. Demolition by neglect is the term used to describe a situation in which a property owner intentionally allows a historic property to suffer severe deterioration, potentially beyond the point of repair. Property owners may use this kind of long-term neglect to circumvent historic preservation regulations. Sometimes demolition by neglect occurs when an owner essentially abandons a historic property. More often, neglect is an affirmative strategy used by an owner who wants to develop the property. Property owners using demolition by neglect as a tactic to work around preservation laws will often argue that the prohibitive cost of repairs and deferred maintenance creates an economic hardship.

Ideally, preservation of historic resources requires safeguards against this tactic. The owner's neglect should not be allowed to create an economic hardship. Controlling demolition by neglect requires affirmative maintenance and adequate remedies, both which extend beyond the Commission's budget and scope.

Going forward, the Commission respectfully suggests that it be involved in budget and maintenance discussions as they arise relative to the Town-owned historic buildings. For example, when it is determined that an historic building like the Roman House or the Buzzell School needs significant repairs and/or maintenance, the Commission would like to be timely notified so that the Public Buildings and the Commission (and school or other departments) can work together to secure funding from preservation sources to ensure that the historic features of these resources can be sustained.

The Commission further recognizes that any major construction or revitalization plan of municipally-owned properties takes years of planning, grant writing, advocacy, and approval by the taxpayers at Town Meeting. Critics of the Commission contend that the vacancy of the Whitefield School over ten years ago should have set the wheels of preservation in motion. In its defense, the Commission states that it was involved with multiple projects over the last two decades that wore its resources thin. Some of those projects include:

- Butters Farmhouse preservation, restoration and adapted use
- Richardson Estate preservation and conveyance
- Swain School preservation
- Establishment of the Town Museum at the Harnden Tavern
- Establishing historic districts
- Arthur T. Bond Collection acquisition, preservation and archiving

Additionally, the Commission attempted to have the Whitefield School designated historic by the National Register of Historic Preservation, but was informed by the Town's administration that approval by the Town Manager would be withheld.

Lastly, the Commission actively pursued the establishment of a Demolition Delay Bylaw and Community Preservation Fund, but were denied.

- Demolition Delay Bylaw: Would establish a predictable process for preserving and protecting significant buildings and other structures within Wilmington which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the cultural, political, architectural or social history of the community. The bylaw would encourage owners of such buildings and other structures to seek out persons or groups of people who might be willing to purchase, preserve, rehabilitate, or restore such buildings or other structures rather than demolish them; or, barring that, to create a record, including a photo/video history of such buildings or other structures; and to provide a reasonable time period for public notice and discussion by interested groups and individuals of means by which to preserve such buildings and other structures.
- Community Preservation Fund: The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a smart-growth tool that helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. CPA also helps strengthen the state and local economies by expanding housing opportunities and construction jobs for the Commonwealth's workforce, and by supporting the tourism industry through preservation of the Commonwealth's historic and natural resources.

CPA allows communities to create a local Community Preservation Fund for open space protection, historic preservation, affordable housing and outdoor recreation. Community preservation monies are raised locally through the imposition of a surcharge of not more than 3% of the tax levy against real property. Monies collected provide a steady funding source for preserving and improving a community's character, quality of life and future.

The Commission feels strongly that the Whitefield School should not be demolished, that funds should be allocated for a feasibility study to be completed on all Town-owned buildings, that the Commission be a part of budget planning for Town-owned historic buildings, that preservation funding be sought whenever possible, and that the Whitefield School be given a chance to be rehabilitated as a vibrant publicly- or privately-owned resource.

Whitefield School Inventory Report: State Registry of Historic Places

Please see the Appendix for the full inventory.

Significance of Preserving History

The continuing presence of historic properties in Wilmington immeasurably enhances the quality of our lives. They help to establish our sense of place and to define the very character of our community.

- We revisit history when we preserve the past
- Our history should make sense to us
- We need history to make our future worth remembering

- Architecture / Structures:
 - keep us connected to our past
 - are evidence of human activity
 - they tell us about ourselves and our community
 - keep our history familiar
 - are learning tools
 - increase awareness
 - preserve values, traditions, sense of community

- We don't live in the past, but we have things to remember it by / memorialize our histories
 - traditions
 - rituals
 - past times
 - hobbies
 - generations of family members

- We are record-keepers of our community's experiences
- Preservation allows us to keep a record of past lives and values
- The only history we have is the history we create
- History is unknown to us and future generations unless we preserve it

- Our history is part of our:
 - identity
 - goals
 - values
 - ideals we don't question (education, e.g.)

- If preserved, not forgotten; once gone, gone and forgotten
- We learn from history
- Students of history make good citizens

- History:
 - raises consciousness
 - provokes and promotes growth
 - memorializes our achievements (preserve and reuse)

Preservation Funding Sources

The following is a list of several preservation funding sources. This list is not all-inclusive and details for some were not available at the time this report was drafted. The Commission respectfully requests that the Town consider these resources as it develops its long-range plan, specifically for the Harnden Tavern, the Whitefield School, Roman House, Buzzell School, South School, West School, and Wilmington's other Town-owned historic buildings.

National Trust Preservation Funds (NTPF) – Planning Grant

- Encourages preservation at the local level by providing seed money for preservation projects; enables local groups to gain the technical expertise needed for particular projects
- Grants generally start at \$2,500 and range up to \$5,000. Applicants must be capable of matching the grant amount dollar-for-dollar
- Application deadline date: October 1

National Trust Community Investment Corporation (NTCIC)

- NTCIC makes equity investments in real estate projects that qualify for federal and state Historic, Low-Income Housing (LIHTC) and New Markets (NMTC) Tax Credits. NTCIC works with a wide variety of property owners including for-profit developers, nonprofit organizations and local governments. Its focus is on projects that have a high economic impact on the surrounding community.
- NTCIC's primary investment partners have been Bank of America, US Bank, Chevron, Nationwide Insurance and Morgan Stanley. NTCIC is a wholly owned for-profit subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the leading nonprofit advocate for historic preservation in the United States. On an annual basis, NTCIC declares dividends to support the National Trust's many preservation-based community development programs including the National Trust Main Street Center.
- Since its inception in 2000, NTCIC has placed \$784 million of gross equity and debt in 104 tax credit transactions with over \$2.8 billion in total development costs. NTCIC pioneered the "twinning" of historic tax credits and New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC's) in 2003, was the first "Community Development Entity" (CDE) to sign a NMTC allocation agreement, and the first to report a Qualified Equity Investment to the CDFI Fund of the US Treasury. It has closed more twinned transactions than any other NMTC allocatee. In addition to providing additional NMTC equity to projects through its own allocation, NTCIC helps developers find NMTC allocations through its National Trust New Markets Brokering Service.

- NTCIC is the historic tax credit industry's leading advocate for improving and expanding the use of federal and state historic tax credits.

Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund (MCFF)

- The Fund provides Capital Grants to promote the acquisition, design, repair, rehabilitation renovation, expansion, or construction of nonprofit cultural facilities in Massachusetts. All grants from the Fund must be matched with cash contributions from the private or public sector.
- Feasibility & Technical Assistance Grants: For planning and feasibility assessment for a proposed eligible project.
- Systems Replacement Plan Grants: A 20-year capital needs assessment of the building and its mechanical systems.
- Capital Grants: For the acquisition, design, construction, repair, renovation, rehabilitation or other capital improvements or deferred maintenance ("Eligible Projects") of a cultural facility. All of the following would qualify for consideration under this description.
- Deadline date varies

Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF)

- A state-funded, 50% reimbursable matching grant program to support the preservation of properties, landscapes, and sites (cultural resources) listed in the State Register of Historic Places. Applicants must be a municipality or nonprofit organization.
- Funds may be used for construction, pre-development projects (historic structures reports, specifications/plans preparation)
- Deadline date varies

Preservation Tax Credits

- Private Sector Investment: The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program encourages private sector investment in the rehabilitation and re-use of historic buildings. It creates jobs and is one of the nation's most successful and cost-effective community revitalization programs. It has leveraged over \$69 billion in private investment to preserve 39,600 historic properties since 1976. The National Park Service and the Internal Revenue Service administer the program in partnership with State Historic Preservation Offices.
- 20% Tax Credit: A 20% income tax credit is available for the rehabilitation of historic, income-producing buildings that are determined by the Secretary of the Interior, through the National Park Service, to be "certified historic structures." The State Historic

Preservation Offices and the National Park Service review the rehabilitation work to ensure that it complies with the Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation. The Internal Revenue Service defines qualified rehabilitation expenses on which the credit may be taken.

- Technical Preservation Services approves approximately 1000 projects, leveraging nearly \$4 billion annually in private investment in the rehabilitation of historic buildings across the country.
- 10% Tax Credit: The 10% tax credit is available for the rehabilitation of non-historic buildings placed in service before 1936. The building must be rehabilitated for non-residential use. In order to qualify for the tax credit, the rehabilitation must meet three criteria: at least 50% of the existing external walls must remain in place as external walls, at least 75% of the existing external walls must remain in place as either external or internal walls, or at least 75% of the internal structural framework must remain in place. There is no formal review process for rehabilitations of non-historic buildings.
- Tax Benefits for Historic Preservation Easements: A historic preservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement, typically in the form of a deed, that permanently protects an historic property. Through the easement, a property owner places restrictions on the development of or changes to the historic property, then transfers these restrictions to a preservation or conservation organization. A historic property owner who donates an easement may be eligible for tax benefits, such as a Federal income tax deduction. Easement rules are complex, so property owners interested in the potential tax benefits of an easement donation should consult with their accountant or tax attorney.

Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey and Planning Grant Program

- The Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey and Planning Grant Program is a federally funded, reimbursable, 50/50 matching grant program to support historic preservation planning activities in communities throughout the state. Eligible applicants for Survey and Planning Grants include all local historical commissions, local historic district commissions, planning offices, and other eligible public and non-profit historic preservation organizations.
- Eligible Activities: As the State Historic Preservation Office, the Massachusetts Historical Commission is responsible for administering the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. The Secretary of the Interior, through the National Park Service and State Historic Preservation Offices, grants funds to communities and private non-profit organizations for a wide range of preservation-related activities. These include:
 - Completion of cultural resource inventories;
 - Nomination of significant properties to the National Register of Historic Places;
 - Completion of community-wide preservation plans; and

- Other types of studies, reports, publications and projects that relate to the identification and protection of significant historic properties and sites.
- The goal of the Survey and Planning Grant program is to support efforts to identify and plan for the protection of the significant historic buildings, structures, archaeological sites and landscapes of the Commonwealth.

Suggested Uses

The following includes suggestions made by Wilmington residents, Historical Commission members, and others. Special recognition goes to Wilmington resident Scott Shuh for these suggestions. The majority of these ideas involve use only of the building and parking, not the playing fields or green space in the back of the building. Therefore, the Town's playing field would still be accessible for related purposes while the building is utilized by organizations that would generate revenue to the Town.

The list is not intended to be all-inclusive, and provides for multiple, simultaneous uses of the building. The Commission recognizes that some of these suggestion replicate existing agencies in Wilmington that are housed in other facilities (including historic buildings). However, as the Town's long-range plan develops, the Commission believes there are purposes for which its historic resources should remain, be timely maintained and utilized.

- Town Archives
- Town/Municipal Structure: School Administration, Town Hall, Recreation Center, etc.
- Medical/Law/Other small business office space
- Fitness/Yoga/Karate/Dance/Craft Studio
- Community Center
- Senior Center
- Mixed residential and commercial space
- Wilmington Food Pantry
- Wilmington Community Fund activities
- Habitat for Humanity
- People Helping People (a Burlington, MA non-profit organization)
- Developing family relationships, e.g.
 - Marriage and family enrichment programs
 - Parenting skills
 - Family fun activities
 - Weddings, reunions, and other family functions
 - Youth activities
 - Single-parent assistance
 - Divorce recovery for all ages
 - Orphan care (Whitefield and his wife operated an orphanage in Georgia)
- Veterans care - The building could serve as a place to come together to support soldiers in active duty, veterans, and other military personnel, e.g.
 - Adopt a Soldier
 - Any Soldier
 - Wounded Warrior Project

- Substance abuse help – The building could serve as a meeting place for individuals and organizations devoted to overcoming unhealthy dependencies on addictive substances, such as:
 - Alcoholics Anonymous
 - D.A.R.E.
 - Wilmington Substance Abuse Coalition
- Disability services and ministries – The building can serve as a meeting place for individuals and organizations devoted to helping those among us overcome disabilities, e.g.
 - Community Services for the Developmentally Disabled
 - Joni and Friends
- Unity among churches – Whitefield was a fervent believer in overcoming denominational barriers. Having access to a facility that invites the churches of Wilmington to join together to do ministries that love and serve its residents (including each other) without walls or barriers.
- Nondenominational church – Wilmington currently does not have a non-denominational or inter-denominational church. The building could provide a place where non-denominational affiliations can meet.
- Youth education
 - Special needs education – The building could be brought up to code and ADA compliance (with the use of grant and matching funds), and could be used by Town and other out-of-district town schools to pool special education teaching resources.
 - Homeschool coops – The building would be an ideal location for area homeschoolers to come together for cooperative classes and programs.
- Continuing education, job retraining programs, and community economic development – The building could provide a place for important re-education of the local labor force and reduce unemployment in Wilmington and the surrounding region. Providers could include:
 - Middlesex Community College – could hold workforce training classes
 - Stimulus funds for Employment and Training Administration
 - MASSCAP
 - Community Teamwork
 - Computer and information technology training

- Personal finance and budgeting – The building could serve as place for Wilmington families, adults and children to learn and practice sound personal financial management (PFM), e.g.
 - Dave Ramsey’s “Financial Peace University”
 - Suze Orman’s “Money Class”
- Gardening, cooking and baking, healthy eating – The building and its grounds could be used to teach residents how to grow, cook, and eat healthy food.
- Arts, crafts, woodworking, etc. – Whether it is continuing to improve existing skills or trying new activities, the building would offer an ideal place for learning creative arts. For example, a crafts class for children could be held during youth sports’ activities so that non-players of the home and visiting teams, and their parents, would have something productive and skillful to learn.
- Reading –The building could offer classes, e.g.
 - English as a Second Language (ESL)
 - Reading clubs
 - Spelling Bees

Features to be Preserved in the Event of Demolition

The Commission has not yet discussed what features of the building it wishes to keep in the event the building is demolished. The Commission respectfully requests that it be allowed a thorough walk-through with representatives of the Massachusetts Historical Commission and like-minded preservationists to ascertain which features should be donated to the Town Museum.